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AUTHOR Timpe, Eugene
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ABSTRACT

Objective and subjective analysis of trade trends, political and economic developments, and the anticipated effects of world-wide energy policies suggest that certain languages will become central to future international trade. Three language categories emerge, in descending order of importance. The first includes languages of the Orient: Japan, China, and very possibly Korea. The second group, French and German, are ranked high because of the opening of the European Community in 1992. The third group, which includes Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, and Italian, is less certain and will depend on the realization of the existing potential for trade. Despite these selections, it is also suggested that foreign markets are so large that proficiency in almost any language will be helpful for entry into international trade. The globalization that is already occurring in the economy assures that there is a need for individuals with knowledge of less commonly taught languages. (MSE)

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WHICH LANGUAGES ARE GOING TO BE OF MOST IMPORTANCE FOR BUSINESS BY THE YEAR 2000

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Dr. Eugene Timpe
Department of Foreign Language and Literature
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois 62901-4521

FL018822

E.F. TIMPE
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Which Languages are Going to be of Most Importance for Business by the Year 2000

The attempt to forsee which foreign languages are going to be most needed for business-language programs is probably best made by blending the objective and subjective approaches. One begins by collecting categories of information, evaluating and weighing them, and then attempting to adduce a relationship between them and the foreign languages under consideration. Up to a certain point there is hard, objective data available, e.g. present and past total trade figures. Beyond this there is reliable information about political and economic developments, e.g. the emergence of a single Common Market within the European Community in 1992. The third category of information is more conjectural. It deals with the expected effects of world-wide energy policies, the uneven growth of high technology, the growth and movement of populations, political changes which affect international trade, and even climatic changes. All of these are wild cards, some wilder than others. They are, however, forces of change with which any prognosticator must reckon. The human mind must somehow take into account the hard, the soft and the unquantifiable data as well as purely speculative matters, and project it all into the future. The degree to which my effort is successful will be apparent when we reach the year 2,000, eleven years from now. I have chosen that length of time because a

decade is a useful span for our own planning purposes, given the fact that the wheels of our bureaucracies tend to turn very slowly, and because the prioritized listing of countries with which we trade is certain to change from one decade to the next.

Let us begin with the so-called facts. They are not very exciting, but they are, despite Rousseau's famous injunction that they deserve no place at all in an argument, at least a starting point. Then we can touch upon trends, and finally we can let our mental computers project into the relatively near future and predict results. The major set of facts comes from the Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration publication called the "U.S. Merchandise Trade Position at Midyear 1988." Within it are two categories of information which are particularly interesting for this exercise: our total trade with the various nations during 1987, and the change in this trade from 1980 to 1987 (27). The first thing that these figures show is that Canada is our largest trading partner (131+ billion). Of more interest to us is that Japan is almost as large (116+ billion) and that since 1980 our total trade figures with Japan have increased by 116%. In the number three position is West Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, considered loosely as one linguistic area, with about two-fifths the total trade of Japan (49 billion) and a substantial increase since 1980 of 58%. All the French-speaking countries together (with 31 billion in trade) amount to about one-fourth of Japan's total

and their increase since 1980 is only 7%. South Korea, which has a trade total (26 billion) which is comparable to that of the countries where French is spoken, however, has the largest increase of any nation listed--186% since 1980. Italy has almost the same volume of trade as France alone (17 billion as opposed to 19 billion), and it has shown an increase over the past seven years of 69%. All the Spanish-speaking countries listed account for 66 billion in trade. Mexico alone is over half of this. The total increase for all these countries since 1980 however, is only 14%. Trade with Portugal is not significant, but the volume with Brazil is over 12 billion and the increase has been 44%. Trade with the Soviet Union has been at the level of two billion over the period under consideration, except that around 1984 it doubled and then dropped back. Finally, China's present volume is like that of Portugal and Brazil together (10 billion), but it has increased by 112%, and it is expected to increase to 30 billion in 1989.

The figures lead to some preliminary conclusions. Japan is clearly the winner on both counts, total volume and increase of volume. China, by which I mean just the PRC, is expected to expand its trade with us most rapidly, and South Korea will have to be reckoned a major trading partner because of both volume and extraordinarily strong expansion. The German-speaking countries account for a sizeable amount of trade, but it is expanding only about half as fast as trade with Korea. The Spanish-speaking

countries account for more trade than the German, but there is very little expansion. The French share is only about half of the Spanish, and it is showing very little growth. The Italian is a fairly small share of the market, but it is increasingly strong. Brazil is definitely a growth area. Trade with the Soviets has remained essentially static. The raw figures have told us something, but not enough. If they tell us anything with certainty it is that the major volume of our trade in the future lies to the east. We seem not to be fully aware of this yet. According to an MLA survey published last year, Japanese accounts for only 2.3% of foreign language enrollments, Chinese for 1.7% and Korean wasn't even on the list. Clearly, changes will have to come if our language offerings are to correspond at all to global market situations.

The next bit of data falls under the category of hard fact but of questionable relevancy. To what extent is English being taught in these countries? Perhaps the more it is taught, the less need there is for our students to study the other language. That would seem logical; yet the facts of the matter seem to point in exactly the opposite direction--the more the other country teaches English, the more interested it is in trade with us. This is borne out by a comparison of the percentages of secondary students learning English to the volume of trade. According to Bailey and Gorlach, Japan and South Korea stand at 100%, i.e. all their secondary students are learning English.

Germany is 66%, France 88%, Italy 30%, Spain 20%, Latin America 54%, and the USSR is 53% (20-23). In general, it seems that the more a country wants to trade with us, the more it stresses the learning of English. But far from obviating our need to learn their language, this increases it, for the more extensive trade is, the more important it becomes for us to know their language. This is especially true if we want to sell, to export, not just to buy.

Now we approach that point in our considerations that would cheer Rousseau's heart. There are few statistics left to give us support. We must turn to matters which are not fully quantifiable, for quantifications mean little without some interpretation. We know from Faaland that the world population is projected to increase from about 4.4 billion in 1980 to 6.2 billion in the year 2,000 (4). Population levels in the highly-industrialized countries are more or less stabilized, so this refers primarily to the third world. But what effect is this going to have on world trade? One interpretation, probably not a very welcome one, is that this addition of almost two billion people is probably going to have little to do with world trade. If past trends continue, the rich nations will continue to get richer and the poor poorer simply because the rate or velocity of development for high technology, highly-industrialized societies is much faster than it is for relatively underdeveloped societies. The rate at which we are progressing is growing exponentially; their growth is relatively slow. Even the

discovery of great oil reserves in an overpopulated third world country would not propel it into the age of high technology, industrialization, and prosperity. Not only would it probably not affect the economy, it would also have no effect on that country's language as a language for trade. If the world's greatest oil discovery were to be made in Luzon, would the Phillipines prosper, and would it cause us to put Tagalog into the language classrooms? No, neither great populations nor great mineral resources necessarily affect world trade standing, and they therefore have little or no effect on foreign languages for business.

Another imponderable, another area in which quantification leaves us without answers, is the opening of the Common Market in 1992. Our Secretary of Commerce, C. William Verity firmly believes that our stakes in this event are enormous. Under the 1992 program the EC plans to allow free movement of goods, people, and services with the twelve member nations. For us the combined market of these nations is now worth about one trillion dollars--they sell about 400 billion to us each year and we sell about 600 billion to them. 1992 should create a market four times that great--a four trillion dollar market comprised of 320 million people. Our exports, already half again as high as our imports, should increase as we become able to sell products throughout the entire EC instead of having to modify them according to the regulations of each country.

But what does this mean for languages? Does it mean that English becomes the lingua franca, or does it mean that one of the European languages will emerge as the dominant language of business, or does it mean nothing? My guess is that the minor languages would continue to play a subordinate role to English, French, and German. Spanish may be an important business language elsewhere in the world, but its importance within the EC would remain much less than the big three.

Now let us abandon numbers altogether. As everyone knows, high technology industrialization, with its robotics, bioengineering, computers, fiber-optics communication, and service orientation now means industrial strength, just as natural resources, coal, oil, heavy machinery, and smokestack industry meant strength in previous times. The world, or at least our corner of it, is changing, and the race is no longer to the strong of back but to the swift of mind. The future is in our classrooms, in the education of our children. The Japanese know this, and the Chinese and the Soviets are learning fast. South Korea borrowed technology from Japan so that they could make quantum leaps forward. It is largely this factor which accounts for the existing trade figures for these Pacific Rim nations, and it is this which will enable them to maintain their position of preeminence.

Of course the equation which we are formulating has many more unknowns. Will, for example, Perestroika prevail? If so, a hibernating bear and all of her cubs would awaken. They have an

insatiable appetite for machinery, for high technology, and for hard currencies. Trade with the Soviet Union and the East Bloc countries could become significant. Such developments, however, are probably farther into the future than the year 2,000.

Global considerations are certainly important in trying to assess future foreign language needs, but so are those tied to the educational institutions themselves. Before you abolish Spanish, French, and German in favor of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, you need to consider your own situation. With which countries does your state trade most heavily? If it has a special orientation, then that may well override general considerations. According to the Department of Commerce, California exports by far the most of any state, and this trade is divided more or less equally between Asia and Europe. Michigan exports heavily to Canda, Texas to Central and South America. If you graduate students who are going to stay within your state, you will want to consider these matters.

In sum I would say that there are several categories of language needs for trading purposes. At the top, by all means of reckoning, is that with the Orient--Japan, China, and very possibly Korea. Next, bolstered by visions of 1992, come French and German. The third category contains Spanish, Russian, Portugese, and Italian. Spanish has a good market share, but most of that is Mexican oil and extra-territorial manufacturing. Too, one cannot imagine the Spanish-speaking countries, so many of which must be reckoned in the third world, suddenly becoming

high tech industrial powers. The Russian question is a moot one. Political events will determine its answer. The Soviets want very much to trade with the West. They need our technology and machinery to fuel their economic recovery. Brazil has great potential as a trading nation. Whether it can overcome its internal economic problems or not is uncertain. As for Italy, I think we can expect no great changes.

After having produced a listing in three categories, however, I feel compelled to say that the foreign markets are so enormous that one can hardly make a mistake by seeking entry with almost any language. There is not only room but actually need for those with knowledge of the less-commonly taught languages. If you can offer Swedish or Arabic or modern Greek, by all means do so. There are market niches for all. Globalization is inclusive, not exclusive, and if there is one thing that is certain in this uncertain world it is that globalization has finally arrived, and it is here to stay.

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